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A

LETTER

TO THE

Protestant Dissenters

IN THE

North of IRELAND,

Occasioned by some TEACHERS from
Scotland, called SECEDERS.

By a PROTESTANT DISSENTER. unanimously



Printed in the Year M,DCC,XLVIII.

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OF THE

PROCEEDINGS

IN THE

CASE OF

EXAMINED BY THE

COMMISSIONERS

AND

REPORT

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IN THE
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Occasioned by some **TEACHERS** from *Scotland*,
called **SECEDERS**.

Christian Brethren,

AS I sincerely desire your Happiness,
that you may be an Ornament to the
Christian Name, and true Friends to
your Country ; I cannot but express the Fears,
I have entertained concerning you, ever since
some Teachers from *Scotland*, called *Seceders*,
have attempted to propagate their Principles a-
mong you. What I apprehended was, that some
of

of you would become Profelytes to these Men; which I am persuaded would be no Advantage to such Profelytes; but would on the contrary hurt them as Christians, by filling them with Wrath and Uncharitableness towards their Brethren, and at the same Time create in them Disaffection to the present Government. Indeed, I never had the least Suspicion, that the greater Part of you would be imposed upon by the low Arts of the *Seceders*. But I doubted some would be gained over to their Interest: And that the whole Body of Protestant Dissenters might suffer through them: For scarce any thing is more common than to impute to a Body of Men the Extravagancies of a Part of them. I know this is injurious and unfair. But since it may happen, it is wise to provide against it.

It is well known, that the *Seceders* adhere to the old *Solemn League and Covenant*. In their Paper entitled, *Akt, Declaration and Testimony*, &c. p. 101. "They assert its perpetual
 "Obligation for Maintaining and carrying on
 "a Work of Reformation in the three Kingdoms." What this means shall be shewn afterwards. In the mean Time I cannot but observe, that whoever adheres to every Thing in that *Covenant*, cannot be a true Friend to the present Government. To make out this, I will give you a short Account of the Origin and Nature of the *Solemn League and Covenant*. I assure you that I will, to the utmost of my Power, set the Facts, which I shall

shall mention, in a just Light, having no Inclination to misrepresent them, or the Authors of them. 11

KING *James* the First, while in *Scotland*, professed a great Zeal for the Presbyterian Church established there. But soon after he went to *England*, he discovered an Aversion to the Church of *Scotland*, and formed a Design to Model it in a great Measure, after the Constitution of the Church of *England*. This he did without the Consent of the Church of *Scotland*; nay, in direct Opposition to his own repeated Promises, and the general sense of the *Scots* Nation. However, he could not fully carry his Scheme into Execution.

KING *Charles* the First followed the Steps of his Father, and as he was generally under the Influence of the worst Counsels, resolved to perfect what his Father had left unfinished. He endeavoured in a Violent manner to overturn the whole Constitution of the Church of *Scotland*, and to impose on the *Scots*, whatever canons, and Forms of Worship were agreeable to Archbishop *Laud*, who was the most Outragious Persecutor that appeared in *England* since the Times of Popery. The *Scots* with great Zeal defended their Constitution, and forced the King to quit his Enterprize.

ABOUT this Time King *Charles* called an English Parliament, which he was constrained to do by the perplexing Difficulties, into which he

he had thrown himself by his oppressive Administration. It is not my Intention to give a Detail of the Misunderstandings between the King and this Parliament, which at length ended in a bloody civil War: A Part of the Nation endeavoured to support the King's Interest, but the real Friends of British Liberty generally espoused that of the Parliament. After some Time the Parliament's Affairs were in such a Situation, that they were obliged to apply to the *Scots* for Assistance. The *Scots* readily promised them Assistance on Condition, that the two Nations would enter into a perpetual *Covenant* for themselves and their *Posterity*, that all Things should be done in the Church of God according to his Will. This *Covenant* being formed in *Scotland*, was soon sent to *London*, where, with a few Amendments, it passed the Assembly of Divines at *Westminster*, and both Houses of Parliament. It was entitled, "A Solemn League and Covenant for Reformation and Defence of Religion, &c. in the three Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland."

It would swell this Letter to too great a Size to insert in it the whole *Covenant*. I need only observe, that they, who took it, engaged in the most solemn manner, "That they would endeavour the Preservation of the reformed Religion in the Church of Scotland in Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government, the Reformation of Religion in the Kingdoms of England and Ireland, in
" Doctrine,

“ Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Govern-
 “ ment according to the Word of God, and
 “ the Example of the best Reformed Churches,
 “ and would endeavour to bring the Church
 “ of God in the three Kingdoms to the nearest
 “ Conjunction and Uniformity in Religion, &c.”

At the same Time they engaged to “ endeavour
 “ the Extirpation of whatever should be found
 “ to be contrary to sound Doctrine.” The
 meaning is, that they would not only judge
 and determine for themselves, but also for Po-
 sterity, what was agreeable to God’s Word :
 so that Posterity had no more to do in Order
 to be acquainted with the *Faith once delivered*
to the Saints in the holy Scriptures, than to
 know the Principles of the *Covenanters* ! For
 they made expresse mention of their Posterity ;
 and agreeably hereto, the *Seceders* affirm, that
 the Covenant is of perpetual Obligation.

MANY Remarks might be made on this ex-
 traordinary Transaction ; but I shall only ob-
 serve, that the *Covenant* was intended to intro-
 duce an Exclusive Establishment into these King-
 doms ; I mean, such an Establishment of Re-
 ligion, as would deprive all Dissenters from it,
 even the most peaceable and conscientious, of
 a Toleration. The Words of the Covenant,
 “ Bringing the Church of God in the three
 “ Kingdoms to the nearest Conjunction and
 “ Uniformity, and the Extirpation of whatso-
 “ ever should be found to be contrary to sound
 “ Doctrine,” evidently bear this Sense. But
 if this should not be admitted, the known
 Practice

Practice of those, who took the Covenant; founded upon it, cannot be reckoned an unfair Interpretation of it.

Now, the Parliament in Consequence of the Covenant " forbid the Use of the common " Prayer-Book in any Place of Publick Worship, " or in any private Place or Family under the " Penalty of five pounds for the first Offence, " ten for the second, and for the third a Year's " Imprisonment." Many of the Bishops in the late Times had been grievous Persecutors of their Fellow Protestants. And now the *Covenanters* persecuted in their Turn. Nay, the *Independent Brethren*, some of whom were Members of the *Westminster Assembly*, could not obtain a Toleration more than the *Episcoplaians*, till *Oliver Cromwel* appeared for them. The high *Presbyterians* alledged, that granting the *Independents* a Toleration was not consistent with the Covenant. And the *Scots* also insisted on it, " That no Toleration should be granted to any Sects or Schisms contrary to their " Solemn League and Covenant."

THESE Facts shew in the plainest Manner, That the Covenant was designed to be an exclusive Establishment, at least by the *Scots*, and the more violent Covenanters in *England*. And considered in this Light, I do not fear to pronounce it to be unrighteous and tyrannical. And I would do the same with Respect to all other Establishments of Religion, that are inconsistent with Liberty of Conscience, which is the Privilege

vilege of every Disciple of Christ. For every Man must answer for his own Behaviour at the Judgment-Seat of the Son of God ; and therefore must have a Right to judge for himself in Matters of everlasting Concern. Will any fallible Man give me satisfactory Evidence, that by following him blindly and implicitly in Matters of Faith, I shall be approved a sound Believer at the last Day ? Would such Conduct be agreeable to these Scripture Directions ? *Search the Scriptures : Prove all Things : Believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God.* Indeed, if Jesus Christ, the only King of his Church, had appointed a Set of infallible Expounders of his Religion in it, their Explications should have been submitted to. But that he has not done: On the contrary he requires his Followers to search the faithful Records of his Religion, that they may perceive the Things therein revealed, and that their Faith may depend on the Authority of God, and not on the Decrees of fallible Men.

If we quit this Foundation, we shall bewilder ourselves in Matters of everlasting Importance. For human Authority hath been a variable, uncertain Thing. Councils have decreed against Councils ; a Set of Divines of one Age has determined against a Set of Divines of another Age. Amidst this variety, we will find no sure Ground, whereon to build our Faith, if we do not use our Understanding in Religion, search the Scriptures, and compare what fallible Men have taught, with them. This we must

do, according to our Capacities, using the best means of Information afforded us, and still depending on God for Assistance. Our Lord has promised, That, *if any Man will do the Will of God, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God*; That is, the upright Inquirer, who desires to know God's Will, that he may do it, shall not only perceive this important Truth, That the Gospel is a divine Revelation, but also discern every thing necessary to Eternal Life. It is inconsistent with God's unchangeable Goodness to forsake one, that sincerely desires to know the way of Salvation, that he may walk in it. *The way of Holiness is so plain, that the Way-faring Men, Persons truly disposed to walk in it, though Fools, or of weak Capacities, shall not err therein.* It is certain, that a Doctrine cannot be absolutely necessary to the Salvation of any Man, which that Man, laying aside Prejudices, and faithfully using the means of Information in his Power, cannot perceive to be revealed in the holy Scriptures. For Faith is not built on the Authority of God, when the Doctrine assented to, is not seen to be contained in his Word. No Doubt, by hearing the Word preached, by Religious Conversation, and by Reading good Books, one may apprehend many Truths, which otherwise one would be ignorant of. These Things are our Duty, and they are valuable means of Improvement, as they tend to enlighten our Understandings, and to help us to see with our own Eyes what God has revealed, that our Faith may ultimately depend on his infallible Authority. Thus, our Lord has

has provided for the Salvation of his Church, without giving any Man, or set of Men, a Power to lead Christians blindfold, or by mere human Authority in Matters of Religion. //

POPERY is the most monstrous Corruption of Christianity that ever was: But the Scheme is consistent with it self. The Church of *Rome* requires an absolute Submission to her Decrees, but she pretends to be infallible. But that Men owning themselves to be fallible, or liable to Mistakes, should deny a Toleration in the State, to all that cannot come up to their Standard, this is an Absurdity as shocking to an unprejudiced Understanding, as Transubstantiation it self. It is a piece of priestly Policy, destructive of the natural Rights of Mankind, and should be treated with Contempt where-ever it is found.

THUS I have endeavoured to lay before you the Origin and Design of the *Solemn League and Covenant*, and have, I think, shewn that it, and all such exclusive Establishments of Religion, are contrary to the Rights and Liberties of Men and Christians, who should never be persecuted *for Conscience sake*. And now I cannot but observe that the Advocates for the *Covenant*, if they be consistent with themselves, cannot be Friends to the present Government, as the Uniformity in Religion, which the *Covenant* was designed to introduce, does not take Place in these Kingdoms, nor indeed in any one of them, according to its original Intent.

THIS is not a bare Suspicion: For the *Seceders*, in their *Act, Declaration, &c.* p. 47. assert that the Oath of Abjuration is one of *our publick national Sins*. By this Oath we *first* renounce, refuse, and abjure any Obedience or Allegiance to the *Pretender*: And *secondly* we faithfully promise, to the utmost of our Power, to support and maintain the Succession of the Crown in the Illustrious House of *Hanover*, they being Protestants. The *Seceders* complain, that this Oath is substituted in the Room of their *Solemn national Covenants*: By which they seem to mean, that they will not engage to support and defend the Succession of the Crown in the present Royal Family, unless his Majesty restore the Solemn League and Covenant. These are the Goodly Politicks of the Men, who are endeavouring to make you their Followers. The End, they aim at, is the Destruction of all Protestants in the three Kingdoms, but their own Party. For their Covenant Uniformity admits of no Toleration of Dissenters.

IT appears by some late Accounts from *Scotland*, that there is a Schism among the *Seceders* themselves, and that one set of them has excommunicated another. There is nothing wonderful in this. For when Men set up on a wrong Foundation in Religion, and mix Superstition, Persecution, and idle, enthusiastic Notions with it, there are scarcely any Bounds, beyond which they will not go.

WHEN these things are impartially considered,

ed, I am persuaded you will not look upon this Letter as unseasonable. Your Ministers are required by the *Act of Toleration* to take the *Oath of Abjuration*; and I firmly believe not one among them hath a scruple against it. How happy is your situation in comparison of that of your Forefathers, who lived in the cruel persecuting Reigns of the *Stuarts*? There is now nothing to hurt or offend you. What a Blessing is that Liberty, which you enjoy? And what a horrid Exchange of Principles will you make, if you once think with the *Seceders*, that the Oath of Abjuration is a *national Sin*? Amidst all your little Debates about Religion among your selves, you have been hitherto, with Respect to the *Reigning Family*, one united, undivided Body. Your greatest Enemies have in vain attempted to asperse you with seditious, and factious Principles, or Practices. And I sincerely wish, that in all Time to come, you may be equally unblameable, equally Friends to the Liberties of your Country, and to the Rights of your Fellow-subjects Guard against the vile, inhuman Principle of Persecution, which is one of the Marks of the *Antichrist* described in the Revelation, as Idolatry is the other. Never envy any Christians their Liberty; but ever shew your selves the Friends and Defenders of it: Your Master declared, that his *Kingdom is not of this World*, and thereby disclaimed all external Force in propagating his Religion in it. Beware of following Men of narrow, rigid, and uncharitable Principles. It is surprizing, that you would be drawn off from your own Pastors by such, I am persuaded
none

none of the *Seceders* from *Scotland* will instruct you better in Christianity, than you are taught it by your own Ministers. Ever shew by sober, holy and exemplary Lives, that you are true Christians. Love Truth and Purity, Goodness and Piety, and be no more Children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine. I am

Your humble Servant,

A Protestant DISSENTER.

Advertifement.

IF any candid Person shall make a Reply to any Part of this Letter, the Author of it promifeth upon Conviction to retract what he cannot defend, or to give a clear and diftinct Answer ; but if any carelefs writer fhall in the Spirit of Popery, relying merely on human Authority, animadvert upon any Part of it, he is determined to take no Notice of fuch a Writer.

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